

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND DEMOCRATIC AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION: THE CASE OF THE EASTERN TRANSVAAL CENTRAL LOWVELD

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Introduction

Land and agrarian policy formulation in South Africa today is taking place in top-down fashion, without any serious attempt being made to involve rural people in the process. As the country enters a transition to democracy, various conceptions and practices of development are being debated. The World Bank and legions of international experts are rushing into the country to assist in the search for policy solutions to the problems of apartheid. While the 'lessons from elsewhere' are being paraded through conference centres throughout the country, little attention has been given to a critique of traditional developmentalism which has perpetuated inequality through its emphasis on market-oriented, technology-based, resource intensive and undemocratic development strategies (Harris et al, 1994). Nowhere is this more evident than on the terrain of land and agrarian reform, where groups of foreign and local experts periodically gather to determine the fate of apartheid's greatest victims. Bold national land reform and rural restructuring programmes are being carved out with scant attention being paid to local detail and regional variation while the crucial question of articulation of scale between local, regional and national policy concerns is largely overlooked.

This paper argues for the development of democratic participatory policy formulation processes, which are rooted in localities and cognizant of the links between local, regional and national level problems. It proceeds on the assumption that land and agrarian reform are of central importance in the creation of a new democratic order in South Africa, given the historical legacy of forced removals and the central role which land dispossession has played in the evolution of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. The paper reviews participatory land reform research undertaken in four villages of the Eastern Transvaal central lowveld in the Kangwane, Lebowa and Gazankulu bantustans. In so doing, it distinguishes between the language of participation as legitimisation and popular participation which entails involving people within localities in defining and prioritising the needs of social transformation. It is argued that this

latter methodology can enhance the involvement of rural people in policy formulation and knowledge production processes. Specific policy proposals emerging from this exercise are critically examined and contrasted with the policy priorities of some of the major players. It is also argued that in order for participatory processes to succeed, they will need to be actively fostered by organs of civil society, including political parties. To date, the question of participation and organisation from below has not been adequately addressed by the ANC, which enjoys virtually unchallenged hegemony in the bantustans of the Eastern Transvaal lowveld. The ANC as a political organ of civil society finds itself ideally placed to take forward a process of participatory policy formulation, planning and development. Nevertheless, its ability to achieve these objectives, will be determined by its capacity to help cultivate the development of local democratic structures which will focus on land reform and local development concerns. Patterns of organisation and resistance in the 1990s cast doubt on the prospect of this being achieved, in the light of the transformation of emergent forms of organisation from below in the late 1980s into centralised structures of organisation from above, following the unbanning of the ANC.

Development from Above, Below and Within

Development strategies in Africa have been imposed from above and have failed to improve the quality of life of the majority of Africans. Indeed their quality of life has seen a steady decline in both absolute and relative terms (Taylor, 1992). This has occurred in a context of deteriorating macro-economic conditions, declining productivity and infrastructure, a rapid regression in social welfare provision and a degeneration of the physical environment (Taylor, 1992:215). Neo-Fabian strategies of the 1970s, characterised by redistribution with growth and the neo-liberal methods of the 1980s with their focus on structural adjustment and market forces have both proved to be inadequate (Chambers, 1989). Central to the failure of these approaches is their inability to come to terms with the specificity of a place and the manner in which development in localities articulates with broader regional and national levels of development. Chambers argues that:

Both ideologies and both sets of prescriptions, embody a planner's core, centre-outwards, top-down view of rural development. They start with economics, not people; with the macro not the micro; with the view from the office not the view from the field. And in consequence their prescriptions tend to be uniform, standard and for universal application (1989:6).

The shortcomings of top-down planning processes have long been recognised in the Third World as a whole, and have given way to an ideology of 'develop-

ment from below', which combined a host of alternative development conceptions influenced by various and disparate neo-populist thinkers including Nyerere, Gandhi and Schumacher who in different ways emphasised the themes of self-reliance, the importance of rural agrarian communities and the notion that 'small is beautiful' (Kitching, 1982; Taylor, 1992). Development from below conceptions thus rested on the fulfillment of basic needs, labour intensity, rural-centred growth, environmentally sound and alternative technology driven development strategies. Nevertheless, despite its general influence by dependency theory, development from below lacked a firm theoretical foundation, and rather centred on broad sets of policy prescriptions and recommendations. A further problem with development from below was its lack of specification of requisite forms of social and political organisation and the failure to understand the relationship between technical policy conditions and political and social struggle, despite its emphasis on participation. At the same time, development planning from below was frequently rejected by Third World planners themselves, who argued that the strategy often accepted the global system as given, and was moreover systematised as a strategy 'from above' by First World planners and development activists (Taylor, 1992:234).

Taylor proposes an alternative 'development from within' strategy hinging on two crucial components, participation and territoriality. Participation is understood as both a means and an end and functions at the level of local communities who 'must enter the participation process at the first stage and be in control of all subsequent stages of action' (1992:240). It cannot be generated from above, but is produced from below, although external agents can act as catalysts. Although participation operates at the level of local communities, there is no assumption that these are homogeneous, and social differences of class, gender and generation are recognised. The second dimension of development from within is that of territoriality. This is not simply a spatial concept, but includes locality as well as social and power relations which occur within a place, and hence involves both physical and social space. The emphasis here is on the environment within a defined territory and indigenous knowledge of localities, as well as the social relationships which shape rural communities and their interaction with the environment.

A major challenge for the development from within concept is to understand the role of the state. In the African context, Taylor argues that the state has failed or is disinclined towards meeting the current development challenges 'or implements policies which are seen by rural people to be detrimental to their interests' (1992:251). He nevertheless does not disregard the role of the state, but draws on Chambers's notion of the 'enabling state' (1989:20) to argue that the state must play a facilitative role in promoting local initiative. The problem with this

conception, however, and indeed the strategy as a whole, is that it does not adequately grasp the state as a complex set of institutions characterised by internal struggles which reflect broader struggles within society as a whole. Just as statism in its African post-colonial developmentalist form has attempted to see the state as the ultimate guarantor of development resources, development from within sees the state as the custodian of the conditions of development in abstract from the struggles which shape state action. Organisation and initiative at the local level take place within specific relations between the state and civil society, as well as within the context of forms of local, regional and national repression which contribute towards shaping the institutions and practices of the state. It thus becomes impossible to develop an abstract theory of 'development from within' as Taylor attempts to do outside of a more concrete analysis of the state, civil society and development in Africa. To attempt less than this, is to develop a theory of policy rather than explanation (Forbes, 1984:134; Mackenzie, 1992:29), thus ignoring the dynamics of state-locality relations and the relationship between different social groups (class, gender, ethnic) within society.

Insofar as rural development is concerned, Mamdani has shown how the daily lives of the peasantry are patterned around extra-economic forms of coercion through the institutions of the chieftaincy and the local state (1987, 1988). The social relations which underpin extra-economic coercion are central to the ordering of conditions under which development takes place. Lineage-based relations are shaped by the patriarchal institutions and generational relations of the chieftaincy and are fundamentally repressive. Participatory processes are articulated within these oppressive relations, and if they are to be empowering, need to directly contest these relations. This is recognised by Mackenzie, another advocate of development from within, who concedes that:

The empowerment of individuals or groups within a community concerns, by its nature, political action. The realisation of strategic needs, which go beyond those of 'coping mechanisms' or 'practical needs', reorders social relations. And these may be perceived as a threat, not only to local interests but also to state power (1992:29).

Popular participation is thus a process of organisation and struggle involving the conscientisation of the people involved, and contests directly the power relations through which people in localities live their day to day lives.

Development from Above South African Style

This assertion is significant, for the concept of participation has become part of mainstream development thinking, achieving the status of a development

'buzzword', and hence means very different things to different people. Participation may become a rhetorical mechanism for legitimising an essentially top-down policy-making process (Levin et al, 1994:2). In the South African context, for instance, the World Bank's Rural Restructuring Programme written up on the basis of a series of short-term 'desk studies', is presented as being 'based on community participation and market-assisted processes' (1993:11).

The basis of such an assertion lies in the collaborative approach developed by the Bank with key South African actors. Unlike in some other African countries, the Bank's route into South Africa was by no means smooth and involved earnest debate and negotiation with some of the key players. Nevertheless, a consensus emerged, which is evident in the common discourse which has surfaced through the Banks' Rural Restructuring Programme. The Bank has been able to consolidate this discourse through involving the Land and Agricultural Policy Centre (LAPC), established under ANC initiative, in its programme. Following intense debate amongst South African technical experts, which was never really filtered down to structures on the ground, the LAPC decided to collaborate with the Bank in drawing up its Rural Restructuring Programme. The thinking behind this was that it would be better to participate in such a process in order to influence World Bank thinking, by on the one hand demanding the involvement of more progressive consultants, and on the other hand, for South Africans themselves to undertake part of the study. Evidence of this growing convergence is provided in a recent paper by Robert Christiansen who led the World Bank's agricultural team in South Africa, and David Cooper, the director of the LAPC. Commenting on the collaboration between the two institutions, they argue that:

As a result of this engagement there has emerged significant (although certainly not complete) convergence about the outline of a development strategy to be pursued in the rural sector. This includes the need to address rural poverty, which is deeply entrenched in South Africa, along with issues of social justice such as land restoration, and economic development within an integrated policy framework (Christiansen and Cooper, 1994:1).

What is not mentioned at this point in the paper, is the convergence emerging between South African and World Bank policy makers on the 'inevitability' (from the South African perspective) of a market-based solution to the land question. The acceptance of the market mechanism as the key instrument of a land redistribution programme within the LAPC, indicates the extent to which South African land and agricultural policy makers are drawing up policy from above. This is because the market as an instrument of land redistribution is widely rejected by black South African people who believe their land to have been stolen by white settlers, a process which has been facilitated by the colonial and

apartheid states. This was evidenced in the Community Land Conference held in Bloemfontein in February 1994, where delegates from over 350 rural communities demanded that 'The land from which people were forcibly removed should be returned (with mineral rights) immediately and unconditionally at no cost to the community concerned'². At the LAPC's conference held in October 1993, where the World Bank's Rural Restructuring Programme was presented, rural participants fiercely rejected the concept of a market-based land reform programme, and when Christiansen presented the programme in a meeting held in the Eastern Transvaal in February 1994, angry participants similarly dismissed such an approach³. Field research in the Eastern Transvaal yielded similar findings where there was widespread rejection of the notion of the buying back of land. In a workshop held in the Gazankulu village of Cork, for example, it was argued that because blacks were not paid for their land when they were forcibly removed from it, white farmers should not be paid for any land taken from them under a land reform programme⁴.

The LAPC, established at the initiative of the ANC has singularly failed to attempt to draw local people into the process of policy formulation, and since its establishment in late 1992, has used the vast funds at its disposal to hire local and foreign consultant experts to write up papers for it. It is of little surprise therefore that South Africa's new developers are pursuing their land reform objectives on two fronts: institutional and technical⁵. The aim of such strategies in which the role of social and political organisation and struggle are lost, is to develop a programme of restructuring rural areas through institutional changes involving land reform, a judicial process of land claims, administrative reorganisation, resettlement schemes and integrated rural development. On the technical front, the World Bank, with the backing of some local development ideologues and key players, is actively seeking to provide the market with a central role in the allocation of resources, while simultaneously carving out a mediating and administrative role for a new post-apartheid state in the supply of grants and loans for land purchase, credit, modern agricultural inputs, extension service and possibly irrigation facilities.

Analyses and prescriptions are full of suggestions inspired by the 'experience from elsewhere', but little thought has been given to the vast array of evidence from other Third World countries which has demonstrated how these technical and institutional-based strategies have benefited particular socio-economic groups. It is important to recognise the relevance of class analysis in the 1990s, since locally contingent struggles over power and resources as well as the role of culture and ethnicity are bounded and influenced by the social structures of production and reproduction (Levin et al, 1994b). Henry Bernstein has argued that one of the key explanations for the failure of rural development programmes

in Africa, is their inadequate understanding of social differentiation. He observes that rich peasants have benefited from programmes, not necessarily because they are more efficient, but because of their political influence:

While 'modernisation' projects have been one source of pressure on many peasant farmers, other farmers - especially those with more substantial assets and political connections - have gained from privileged access to the new inputs and credit that projects make available. The position of the 'progressive' (more commercial) African farmer, a figure idealised by colonial agricultural officers, has often been strengthened by development projects, but not necessarily in ways intended by project planners. Richer peasants often get the lion share of project resources, not because of their greater economic 'efficiency', but through their ability to influence the local administration of projects (1992:73).

These instructive lessons derived from the experience from elsewhere have not made any impact on the emerging Rural Development discourse in South Africa, apart from its emphasis on the need to identify target groups and potential beneficiaries of a new dispensation. Njobe develops three broad criteria for access to land based on victimisation, need and productivity⁶. Within each of these criteria, a number of beneficiaries are listed. Victims of apartheid, nationality, and rural residency are listed under victimisation; poverty, number of dependents, status in society and previous experiences of farming are listed under need; while health, age, net worth, education levels, gender, entrepreneurial skills and managerial aptitude are listed under productivity. She also notes that these criteria:

...will need to be tested very consistently among the affected communities. There is already a current danger that extensive reconstruction programmes are being developed without the active and equal participation of the affected communities and more particularly the women and the poor (1993:14).

The point here of course is that the list of beneficiaries has been drawn up in abstraction from concrete field research, and is then being handed down to 'affected communities' for modification and ratification. This methodology exemplifies a language of participation which precludes the possibility of genuine participation, while exhibiting a technicism that rules out democratic participation and politics. It is also worth noting that the true position of 'women and the poor' can only be ascertained through an analysis of socio-economic differentiation. This is because an assault on poverty can only be conducted through understanding and transforming the *social structures* of poverty and inequality.

A further problem with the kind of methodology employed by Njobe as well

as the World Bank more generally, is that no attention has been given to the notion that specific strategies are likely to select 'beneficiaries' for themselves irrespective of the chosen or desired target group. Market-based land reform options for example, have tended to benefit rich peasants and the efficient sectors of large-scale and corporate agriculture, and there is no reason to believe that they will benefit other groups in the South African context. Indeed, an emergent petty-capitalist class in the bantustans is the likely beneficiary of a market-based land reform strategy, while various strata of the rural proletariat are likely to continue to be marginalised. Despite the continued emphasis on the need for affirmative action along gender lines, it is unlikely that this will be realised in practice through a market driven process. If the most oppressed and exploited rural groups, including women, are to benefit from land and agrarian reform, this will need to transform social structures of poverty and oppression which are rooted in the South African rural political economy. This emphasises the importance of a political programme of democratic mass-based participation. Central to such a programme is the identification of social class, gender and generational-based differences which are likely to impact on processes of participation.

Participatory Research in the Eastern Transvaal Central Lowveld

Participatory research undertaken with these considerations in mind, involved people within four villages of the Eastern Transvaal in an ongoing process of discussion and dialogue around questions of land reform and research findings⁷. Progress reports became a central element in this process, and workshops evolved as the ideal format through which land reform policies could be discussed and debated. This interactive approach was coupled with a genuine attempt on the part of the researchers to immerse themselves in the social life of the villages being researched. At the same time, an effort was made to establish a committed working relationship with the rural people under investigation, based on a mutual commitment to progressive rural restructuring and land reform. The research team thus facilitated involvement by village groups from the Eastern Transvaal in the National Land Committee's Community Land Conference held in Bloemfontein on 12-13 February 1994⁸. Burkey has commented on the importance of relationships between researchers and researched in the attempt to develop genuine participatory methods:

The relationship between the investigator and the groups being investigated is a fundamental aspect of participatory research methods. Not only is it necessary for the people themselves to participate in the analysis of their own reality, but the investigator must share this reality in order to understand it. It is not possible

to get a correct understanding of social realities by coming into an area, collecting answers to pre-determined questions and then retiring to statistically analyse the data (1993:61).

Accordingly, the different elements of the research, the socio-economic survey, mapping, intensive interviewing and social histories were discussed in four workshops held in each of the research sites over a one-year period. Initial meetings were held with interested residents in each village in December 1992, where a report-back was given on the pilot survey conducted in July 1992. It was then proposed that a first workshop be held in January 1993, at which a report-back would be given to a wider audience on the objectives and progress of the research to date. This was done in each village, and at these meetings, committees were elected to liaise with the research team. The hope was that these committees would become the focus of local land issues. At the first workshop, a variety of questions were posed. One set of questions focused around issues of which land should be made available, how it should be obtained, and how it should be allocated. These questions generated discussion on issues of compensation and the importance of land reform in the bantustans. Another set of questions focused on agriculture and agricultural systems, while another centred on the problem of skills and resources. The final set of questions concentrated on development and local understandings of the issue.

The second set of workshops, in July 1993, were held with the elected land committees, and reported back on opinions expressed in the first workshops. These meetings also involved the discussion of 1:50,000 maps, where local knowledge on soil quality, land use and forced removals was generated. A third set of larger workshops were held soon after the meetings with the village committees, where report-backs were made and villagers were introduced to local village maps drawn up from aerial photographs as a mechanism for generating discussion around land reform in the bantustans. These workshops were invaluable in terms of unearthing indigenous knowledge of local historical geographies, and important information was generated in them on important research themes including forced removals and the chieftaincy. They also began to reveal the high expectations being generated by the presence of the research team, and in cases, some impatience with the fact that little concrete progress or development had been experienced since the arrival of the research project team in the area. It became increasingly important to stress that this was essentially a research project, and that the aim of the participatory interactive approach, was to involve local people in the policy-making process, and to engage people in the drafting of local policy documents which could be used as mobilising tools and become the first step in a development planning exercise.

In order for the final workshop to lead to the production of practical policy

documents, information gathered through the workshops and other relevant research data, was drawn together under five key questions or themes:

1. Where to get land;
2. How to get land;
3. How to allocate and use land;
4. What production systems to develop on the land;
5. Who should benefit from land reform.

This information was compiled into draft policy documents which were discussed and amended in the final village workshops held in January 1994. Two delegates were then elected in each village to attend the final CPLAR workshop in Johannesburg in March 1994.

Participatory Policy Formulation and National Policy Agendas

The project's final workshop was attended by over 60 people, including the elected village delegates, the project team, local and international academics, South African NGO activists and political leaders directly involved in land and agrarian reform policy formulation. The primary aim of the workshop was to present and discuss initial findings, and to continue the participatory process of involving rural people directly in the policy formulation process. The workshop demonstrated the necessity and value of localised participatory research and policy formulation. The village delegates participated actively and debated with academics, and their policy documents made a major impact on workshop deliberations.

The documents describe widespread land hunger, and articulate very specific demands. These include:

1. Access to high quality arable land to produce more food to guarantee greater household food security;
2. Special attention being given to the poor and women as potential land recipients;
3. The rejection of market mechanisms as the major components of land transfer;
4. The restriction of the powers of the chieftaincy in the land allocation process while giving new government structures and democratically elected local committees the power to allocate land;
5. The rejection of existing institutions, including the DBSA and its im-

plementing agencies, Kangwane (Agriwane), Gazankulu (the Gazankulu Development Corporation) and Lebowa (the Lebowa Agricultural Corporation).

The policy documents also identify some specific areas where they believe land reform should take place. These are primarily in areas where forced removals have taken place, and include land now under afforestation, large-scale fruit plantations, underutilised and state land near Hazyview and specific areas in the Kruger Park, including along the Sabie River.

These local demands and views contradict many policy ideas currently being debated at the national level. This may to some extent reflect the different understandings held by local people and policy makers of what land reform is about. Local people view land reform in the context of the struggle for improved conditions of social reproduction, justice and survival. Policy makers on the other hand, also often view land reform in the context of justice, but this is tempered by questions of economic efficiency. The view articulated in the village policy documents on land for food security, is rejected by many policy-makers and indeed contradicts to some extent, the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The expressed position by villagers, is that not all people want land in order to become farmers; many want to continue pursuing multiple-income strategies in which land for producing the means of subsistence is a key component. The RDP in contrast argues that: 'The most important step toward food security remains the provision of productive employment opportunities through land reform, jobs programmes and the reorganisation of the economy' (ANC, 1994:41-42). This position partly reflects the relative lack of participation in the drafting of the RDP, in comparison with its predecessor, the ANC's *Ready to Govern* policy guidelines.

This document was drafted in a national conference of elected delegates in May of 1992. The process was inclusive and participatory, involving intensive discussions at local branch level as well as regional conferences where elected delegates were mandated to attend the national conference with democratically derived positions. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), on the other hand, was drawn up by the ANC-South African Communist Party (SACP)-Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)-Alliance under pressure from COSATU in particular. Within the ANC, the RDP only filtered down to branches in its fourth draft stage. Although ultimately adopted at a national conference of the Alliance in January 1994, branch-level participation was minimal compared with the process leading to the adoption of the *Ready to Govern* policy guidelines. The RDP does, however, draw on many of the policy positions of the *Ready to Govern* document.

What is striking about the RDP in contrast with the *Ready to Govern* document

is the ascendancy of the market as the major mechanism of land reform. This reflects to some extent the growing influence of World Bank thinking in land and agrarian policy formulation. The *Ready to Govern* document assigns a far greater role to the state in land acquisition. While this paper, and indeed the villagers themselves, do not reject a role for the market altogether, it must be recognised that the role of the market in land redistribution is a highly contested policy issue. In negotiating a new constitution for the country, a key decision revolved around whether to enshrine property rights in a new constitution. The major fear amongst those opposing such a measure, is that it would effectively protect *existing* property rights and therefore unjustly reproduce existing inequalities. These problems were recognised by none less than Judge Didcott who argued that 'what a bill of rights cannot afford to do, is to protect private property with such zeal that it entrenches privilege' (Chaskalson, 1993:1). Notwithstanding such concerns, the new constitution includes property in its Fundamental Rights chapter, and states that:

Where any rights in property are expropriated...such expropriation shall be permissible for public purposes only and shall be subject to the payment of agreed compensation or, failing agreement, to the payment of such compensation and within such period as may be determined by a court of law as just and equitable, taking into account all relevant factors, including, in the case of the determination of compensation, the use to which the property is being put, the history of its acquisition, its market value, the value of investments in it by those affected and the interests of those affected (Republic of South Africa, 1994:16).

This effectively ensures that a land reform programme will be market driven, a factor to which most senior ANC officials privately concede. As noted above, the World Bank's RRP advocates land redistribution through the market, and has already estimated the sum of the costs this would entail. Nevertheless, on the ground, this strategy is widely rejected, particularly by the victims of forced removals. In a workshop held in Cork village, Gazankulu, for example, participants argued that because black people were not paid any compensation when they were forcefully removed from their land, white farmers should not be paid for land taken from them under a land reform programme. Nevertheless, it was argued that an exception may be made with regard to the development costs incurred by occupants, although if the costs were recovered through profits, then there would be no need to compensate the present owner (9 January 1993). What is significant, however, is that workshop participants also argued that white farmers should not be forced to leave their farms. Rather they should be encouraged to share the land and live together with black people and share the

skills and knowledge of farming with them.

Land redistribution which relied exclusively on market mechanisms, remains a highly contentious issue, as reflected in a group interview with victims of forced removals in Marite, Lebowa. A question was posed around how people would feel if a land claims court could only deal swiftly and efficiently with claimants who held title deeds to land. One angry respondent retorted:

We are prepared to use any means available to get our land back. That is why we should continue to struggle. Our fellow comrades have lost their lives for the struggle. We are fighting for our own liberation. It is very dangerous to talk of the title deeds only and ignore the rightful owners of the land. And if they do not give in to our demands, we will resort to the PAC's slogan, 'One settler, one bullet'. If necessary, whites should be driven back into the sea. They left their countries of origin to settle here. It is very important that the new government should deal with the issue of title deeds very carefully. How were they acquired and did the people get any compensation when they were removed from their farms. These are some of the questions that should be asked. All the people who were evicted should be given proper compensation. There is no way we can remain poor in our native land. For instance, let us say Mr Monareng has a pair of shoes, and at night I come and steal it. If the owner identifies his shoes even if there are slight changes made to them, do you expect him to pay for the changes that have been made? I do not think that is possible because I have acquired ownership through illegal means. We are not going to compensate them for stealing our land. Those documents in their possession do not mean anything to us. I can print my own documents and backdate them to 1901. We are not going to discuss the issue of title deeds based on documentation (Group interview, Marite, 20 January 1993).

The question of the chieftaincy is another controversial issue. While ambiguities do exist in terms of rural people's attitude towards the chieftaincy as an institution, in the Eastern Transvaal central lowveld, there is unequivocal opposition to the chieftaincy's continued control over land allocation. Survey results indicate that in the four villages investigated, a total of 85 per cent of villagers are opposed to the chief allocating land. The opposition to the chieftaincy emerges from corrupt practices and the use of extra economic coercion by chiefs through the extraction of labour and other forms of 'tribal levies'. Villagers have presented a clear alternative to the chieftaincy continuing to allocate land: democratic local committees. This emerged out of workshop discussions in all four villages. At Cork for instance, it was argued that:

For a long time, the chief has been allocating the land, but he has

failed to meet people's needs. It was the chief who worked with the government to remove people. Therefore, we do not want the chiefs to continue allocating the land... The chiefs have tried, but have failed. Farmers established a co-operative and the money was put under the supervision of the chief by the chairman of the co-operative without proper consultation. When the committee tried to get access to the money, they had problems. They then voted out the chairperson and went ahead and took the money themselves. This angered the chief and he withdrew his support from the co-operative and stifled some of the schemes that he had facilitated setting up, such as the diesel scheme. As a result of these tensions, the co-operative eventually broke down. Therefore the chiefs should not have control and there should be a committee which is elected and controlled by the people (Cork workshop, 8 January 1994).

Despite locally-based opposition to the continued role of chiefs in land allocation and development issues, the new constitution allows for continuities in the role of chiefs on this terrain. Chapter 11 of the interim constitution states that:

A traditional authority which observes a system of indigenous law and is recognised by law immediately before the commencement of this Constitution, shall continue as such an authority and continue to exercise and perform the powers and functions vested in it in accordance with the applicable laws and customs, subject to any amendment or repeal of such laws and customs by a competent authority (1994:116).

While this does allow space for the erosion of the powers of the chieftaincy through amendment of laws by a 'competent authority', the special role accorded to chiefs is seen in a clause which provides for chiefs to become *ex officio* members of local government structures. Moreover, provisions have been made for the establishment of Provincial Houses of Traditional Leaders in 'each province where there are traditional authorities', as well as a national Council of Traditional Leaders. This council is empowered to:

...advise and make recommendations to the national government with regard to any matter pertaining to traditional authorities, indigenous law or the traditions and customs of traditional communities anywhere in the Republic or any matters having a bearing thereon. (1994:118)

These powers set the stage for an ongoing struggle around the chieftaincy, and provide chiefs with powerful constitutional mechanisms to counter mass-based initiatives against the institution. Chiefs have been able to successfully assert their role in the constitutional future of the country, partly as a consequence of ANC ambiguity on the chieftaincy. While the struggles of the 1980s under the

UDF seriously eroded the powers of the chieftaincy in many localities, the ANC, in its efforts to stabilise politics in these areas, has chosen to be more pragmatic. In the Eastern Transvaal, for example, there is a broad attempt on the part of the ANC to distinguish between 'political issues' and 'traditional functions' when examining the future role of the chieftaincy. One regional leader argued that:

African people have different cultures and traditions. The chieftaincy is a long established institution, and, although the roles of the chiefs were changed, and more powers given to them, like over land allocation, the ANC maintains that the chieftaincy should not be done away with. The existing reality is that the chiefs play a political role, and there are chiefs who want to retain political power... Chiefs should organise traditional functions and not deal with land allocation because it is a political issue (Interview, Nelspruit, 8 December 1993).

This ambiguity however, presents real problems for ANC activists on the ground. This was illustrated in a meeting between the Eastern Transvaal ANC land commission and Chief Mbuyane of Tlau Tlau (19 January 1993). The meeting focused on the demands of residents who had been evicted by the chief, and who then appealed to the ANC to intercede on their behalf. What was interesting about this meeting was the completely different conception by Chief Mbuyane of politics and traditional functions to that expressed above. The chief argued that the chieftaincy and the ANC are separate spheres of activity, and that the ANC does not 'have the authority to interfere in a matter like this' (19 January 1993). This is because those who were claiming to have been evicted had not obtained the land through the chief to begin with and therefore had illegally occupied the land and had no legal claim to it. He also contended that: 'the chieftaincy is governed by a workable constitution which the ANC should not interfere with', and that the ANC's actions in the Eastern Transvaal 'seem to contradict what Mr Mandela told us about the future role of chiefs'. While he agreed that a decision had been taken in 1989 to form local committees to work with the chiefs in order to obtain land, he had never met with such a committee and has no working relationship with such structures. The meeting thus ultimately agreed that people would have to obtain land within the existing framework of the chieftaincy and its laws.

The ANC's ambiguity is in sharp contrast with the position of the civics in the Eastern Transvaal who are generally in open conflict with the chief over spaces of organisation and power. One Kangwane civic leader argued that the position of the ANC has prevented the chieftaincy from withering away:

People accept the chiefs, but they are seen as largely irrelevant and not given much allegiance. This is because the people are now too developed to accept hereditary leadership. People also believe that

the chief is a stumbling block to development, especially in the areas of rapid development and urbanisation in the Nsikazi district. There is a conflict between the civics and the ANC over the ANC's policy of protecting the chiefs, even though the institution is being eroded by the developing environment. If the ANC did not have this strategy, it is possible that the chieftaincy would have been eroded by now (Interview, Mahhushu, 12 December 1993).

This view, common within civic leadership reflects the search for continuities in bottom-up processes of democratisation experienced through the struggles of the late 1980s in the Eastern Transvaal (Levin and Solomon, 1994). This raises serious questions about the possible success of participatory processes of research and transformation.

Participatory Research and Democratic Agrarian Transformation

This paper has argued that genuine popular participation constitutes a threat to existing power relations. This view has been echoed by Oakley and Marsden (1984) who argue that :

...meaningful participation is concerned with achieving power: that is the power to influence the decisions that affect one's livelihood. We cannot conceal the fact that the practice of empowering challenges established interests and seeks to confront those forces which oppose the rural poor's access to the means of development. Established bureaucracies do not charitably concede participation. This participation must result from the unrelenting processes from below. We conclude that the meaningful participation of the rural poor in development is concerned with direct access to the resources necessary for development and some active involvement and influence in the decisions affecting those resources. To participate meaningfully implies the ability positively to influence the course of events (Quoted in Burkey, 1993:59).

The success of popular participation is contingent upon levels of local organisation. This is because the transformation which popular participation implies cannot be achieved through gestural commitment to notions of 'participation' and 'empowerment'. The potential for participatory policy formulation to deliver democratic policy implementation thus rests on the state of organisation within a locality. The bantustan villages of the central lowveld in the Eastern Transvaal are differentiated and fragmented along class, gender, ethnic, generational and lineage lines. These kinds of divisions impact directly on the potential for coherent organisation, and have been manipulated by the state historically in order to demobilise bantustan people. During the mid-late 1980s, the first step

towards coherent organisation were undertaken under the influence of the United Democratic Front (UDF). For the first time, villagers in the area under investigation were drawn into the broad framework of the national liberation movement. It is important not to romanticise UDF organisation and resistance, but general patterns, however tenuous and tentative, were established.

It was the youth who were initially most active, and older people only became involved in the late 1980s when civics were established. Older people perceived the youth to be undisciplined, and this points to a generational gap in the organisation of anti-apartheid struggle and resistance in the Eastern Transvaal during this period. Even today, there are many elders who are supportive of the ANC, but decline active involvement because the organisation's image has been tarnished by what are seen as 'undisciplined' youth activities (Interview, 22 January 1994). The central role of the youth in the struggle, has its parallel in Zimbabwe, where Kriger (1991) has suggested that participation by youth in the guerrilla struggle, transformed the relationship between the youth and their parents. Involvement with guerrillas in the field led the youth to be less dependent on their families, while:

'Youth' used their power which they acquired from their duties in the support organisations to challenge 'parents' authority and control over their lives. The opportunity to alter oppressive constraints imposed by elders on their daily life...provided an important impetus that helped sustain 'youth's' participation in the guerrilla war (1991:127).

It is clear that the youth played a central role in the development of organisation and resistance in the Eastern Transvaal, and their capacity to sustain levels of organisation relates closely to their resistance to oppressive generational relations, relations within the household and broader lineage-based village relations.

What is important, is the changes which occurred in political organisation with the unbanning of the ANC. The unbanning of the ANC had a profound impact on the political landscape in the Eastern Transvaal, and fundamentally transformed nascent forms of organisation and resistance. While it boosted the confidence of rural villagers, it also recast emergent forms of organisation from below into more centralised structures of organisation from above. The result has been the development of a top-down style of politics which has led to the political demobilisation of the people:

There had been a culture of local participation in development, but this ended once the UDF stopped organising. Now, people wait for the ANC. It has taken the struggle away from grassroots initiatives. Concentrating on the transition is different to concentrating on local demands; as a result, people have become demobilised...Furthermore, ANC branches are not strong. There

are no issues for people to organise on a local basis. The only issue is trying to ensure Mandela's victory in April, but that doesn't help at all with development. During the time of the UDF, people were organised on local political issues relating them to national ones and that is not happening any more. People are not encouraged to take up local issues (Interview, Mahhushu, 12 December 1993).

A further problem is manifest in the relationship between the ANC and the civics. The unbanning of the ANC allowed the organisation to move into the space created by UDF structures, elect a new leadership and begin to divide up spaces of organisation between itself and the civics. Higher up in the regional political hierarchy, a slightly different picture to the one presented above is painted of the impact of the unbanning, but one which nevertheless confirms the existence of a division of political space between the ANC and the civics. Nevertheless, there also appears to be a symbiotic relationship between the ANC and civic organisations. Sunday Maphanga, deputy regional secretary of the ANCYL and ANC land commission member remarked that:

The unbanning of the ANC had an impact on a variety of other organisations. The unbanning strengthened the structures which are in alliance with the ANC and influenced the thinking of other structures... There was an even growth of civic associations. The major problem was the lack of a clear programme of action... There are conflicts of interest between the civics and the ANC when the civics take up political issues. Where both organisations are strong, joint programmes are undertaken. Where there is a weak ANC structure, the civic will also be weak (Interview, Nelspruit, 8 December 1993).

The civics have been cast in a developmental role, and they are seen as being politically neutral. This is despite the fact that 'there is a misconception that the civic is the ANC. The civic is not a political body, but it accepts the policy of the ANC as a liberation movement. The civic is the development wing of the people' (Interview with civic leader, Mhala district, 7 December 1993).

Although there is a general enthusiasm about the presence of the ANC and civics there is little active ANC or civic involvement in land issues. The land question is clearly a central issue in the lives of ordinary villagers, and there is some commitment in the ANC regional office to the land question. It operates a land and agriculture desk in its department of economic planning, but the land portfolio has changed hands after each Annual General Meeting and the election of a new Regional Executive Committee.

On the ground, however, there is little evidence of a coherent ANC programme, as observed by an ANC leader from Cork who stated that 'the ANC has failed to take practical steps to deal with the land issue' (Interview, Cork, 8 December

1993). This view is reflected in village interviews. Two Manzini residents remarked that 'the ANC should be very active on land issues. The ANC and aligned bodies have been very serious on other political demands, but not on land issues' (Interview, Manzini, 7 December 1993). Another Manzini respondent echoed this: 'The ANC to date has not taken up a serious campaign on land, but the ANC should be taking a pro-active role in land campaigns for example land claims' (Interview, Manzini, 7 December 1993); while another emphasised the importance of the land question in social transformation, urging the ANC to take a more active role:

If the struggle does not change the present land system it will have been meaningless for the rural poor. The organisations that have been fighting apartheid should prioritise the acquisition of land for agricultural and residential purposes (Interview, Manzini, 7 December 1993).

A central weakness in the ANC's attempt to organise around land issues, is its failure to come to terms with the articulation of different levels of organisation at the national, regional and local scale. This remains a crucial challenge for the success of participatory processes. Following the unbanning of the ANC, the organisation moved quickly to establish a National Land Commission which began a process of policy work through the establishment of Regional Land Commissions. These structures were integrated into initiatives which in view of existing constraints were reasonably democratic, but which were inadequately linked to the local level. It was these structures which were responsible for early policy work, through the 1991 National Conference in Durban, to the National Policy Conference held in Johannesburg in 1992. Following the policy conference, however, the National Land Commission began to disintegrate. One problem identified at the Durban Congress was the absence of a specific department of land and agricultural affairs. Despite recommendations made by the National Land Commission, it was effectively dissolved in 1992 and subsumed under the department of economic planning as the land and agriculture desk. The head of the National Land Commission was assigned the portfolio of agriculture, and the task of policy work more broadly while an appointment was made in 1993 to fill the vacant land portfolio. Steps were taken in the latter half of 1993 to revive the National Land Commission with its regional structures, but by then, links with local level structures had grown even weaker. This illustrates the impact of a centrally directed negotiations approach as the linchpin of overall strategy on the democratic workings of structures within the organisation. It does not mean, however, that land issues have been totally lost within the ANC. On the contrary, a progressive, albeit contradictory policy guideline exists (Levin and Weiner, 1993), while the Reconstruction and Development Programme of

the alliance sets out a programme of land reform based largely on these guidelines. Nevertheless, the place accorded to private property rights in the ANC's own proposed Bill of Rights, as well as the concessions made by the organisation in the Interim Constitution, indicate that the aspirations of rural people around land have been subordinated to other priorities. It was of little surprise therefore when a large demonstration of rural people outside the World Trade Centre in September 1993 warned all negotiating parties not to ignore the land demands of rural people. The attempts by the NLC to facilitate the formation of a rural social movement around the Community Land Conference in Bloemfontein in February 1993, are a further indictment of the ANC's failure to take the land question sufficiently seriously.

Another major problem with existing ANC land policy is that insufficient attention has been given to the role of organisation and resistance and as a consequence, the question of participation is not adequately addressed. While participatory approaches to development and land reform are far more likely to be successful than centrally directed top-down approaches, participation in itself cannot guarantee a truly democratic and representative process of policy formation and development. The key question of 'who' participates needs to be addressed in a way that integrates the broad mass of people into the process. This can only be achieved through an understanding of the social structure of rural communities along class, gender, generational and ethnic lines. The state's historical strategy of oppressing and marginalising rural communities has been affected through the creation and sustenance of the tribal authority. The effect of the ANC's ambiguity on the chieftaincy, has been to consolidate a highly repressive institution and network of power relations which excludes the most marginalised in the rural areas. This has important ramifications for the process of democratic participatory development and land reform. So does the erosion of civil society and the emergence of the ANC as a more top-down, centrally directed organisation than the UDF.

A successful participatory approach to policy, planning and development work is predicated upon the existence of democratic structures on the ground, or else on the existence of the space to develop these, since it is through processes of participatory policy, planning and development work that democratic structures can evolve. This would suggest that a strong civil society is a precondition for democratic development, and implies that the civics are the key structures for a future participatory development programme. The experience of the civics in the post-1990 period indicates that they have relied heavily on the ANC for their organisational development, and that they have not yet developed clear democratic procedures and practices. The ANC should not abandon the terrain of civil society as it becomes a political party; in the central lowveld and

elsewhere, it remains hegemonic. There is a tradition of South African political thought and practice which believes that the movement form is a far more effective construct for representing the interests of civil society (Fine, 1992). It is argued that political parties generally, and the ANC in particular, as the leading force within the Government of National Unity (GNU), represent the state 'side' of the state/civil society dichotomy. This ignores the fact that even though the ANC heads the GNU, in the present period it cannot effectively become the state, even if it wants to be, given the constraints of the interim constitution. The fact that the civil service is still largely run by functionaries of the old order attests to this. Furthermore, political parties themselves are also organs of civil society, and if democratically organised in bottom-up fashion are probably the most effective mediators between civil society and the state.

The ANC is thus ideally placed to facilitate a programme of participatory policy, planning and development, provided that its structures are democratically organised from local through regional to national level. The situation on the ground leaves cause for concern. As we have shown, the emergence of the ANC has led to the erosion of nascent democratic grassroots structures which were subordinated to the priorities of the construction of a national political project. The formation of such a project was undoubtedly of critical importance, but the practices associated with it tended to replace grassroots initiative with top down direction. The overall consequence is the undermining of prospects for the evolution of a successful participatory development strategy.

Conclusion

The massive failure of development in Africa is an indictment of top-down statist forms of developmentalism. Participatory policy formulation and planning is one possible strategy for overcoming past failures, but requires a commitment to transformation of existing local power structures. Participatory research is one component of a participatory strategy which in order to be genuine and popular requires systematic political organisation. On its own, and in isolation, participatory research runs the risk of raising expectations which a research project on its own cannot satisfy. This was recognised in the CPLAR, and the project team attempted at all stages of the research to emphasise that research on its own could not deliver land or other resources. The message to some extent was driven home. In the final project workshop, a village delegate from Malekutu remarked that:

We do not expect the project team to deliver our land to us. What the research has done is to help us to raise our level of consciousness and to help us understand the different questions which must be asked and answered in order to make a land policy (CPLAR

Final Workshop, 13 March 1994).

Participatory research thus can act to facilitate a process of democratic interaction and in so doing, strengthen organisation and the potential for collective action and struggle. In an interview with Mr Papi Nkosi of the Kangwane Agricultural Union, he commented that:

The point I want to emphasise is that we should continue to have discussions of this nature so that we can give you more information about land issues. If we do not have a clear direction at the grassroots level, our politicians will make laws which are contrary to our needs. But if we are united at a grassroots level, we will be in a position to influence national land policy (Interview, Kabokweni, 19 January 1993).

Participation and research are integral to democratic agrarian transformation, but require objective conditions which include an environment of strong rural organisation, and a commitment by national leadership to local-level involvement in policy formulation. This paper suggests that the experience of South Africa over the last few years implies that the implementation of participatory planning and development to ensure bottom-up development practice cannot be taken for granted, and will entail organisation and struggle.

NOTES

- 1 I wish to acknowledge the support of the MacArthur Foundation for funding the research for this paper through the *Community Perspectives on Land and Agrarian Reform Research Project* (CPLAR). I would also like to acknowledge the contribution made by Daniel Weiner to the evolution of the ideas presented in this paper. The two of us jointly managed the *Community Perspectives on Land and Agrarian Reform in South Africa Project*, and have evolved a collective working practice which makes it difficult to identify the originator of particular ideas. I am therefore, deeply indebted to Daniel Weiner, although in the final instance, I must take responsibility for the positions articulated in this paper.
- 2 Community Land Conference, 12-13 February, Bloemfontein (National Demands: Land Restoration, 'The land that was stolen from us must be returned').
- 3 It is important to note that the World Bank distinguishes between land restitution for the victims of forced removals, and land redistribution. Difficulties emerge when defining who the 'victims' are in the light of the large numbers of rural people who have been forcibly removed. The Bank and the ANC, have identified four broad categories of forced removal:
 1. Black spot removals;
 2. Labour tenants and squatters;
 3. Bantustan consolidation removals; and
 4. Betterment planning removals

The problem is that in the Eastern Transvaal Central Lowveld, for instance, large numbers of people were labour tenants, who were geographically dispersed by removals. This will lead to multiple and overlapping claims which will make a Land Claims Court's task extremely difficult if not impossible to perform. Another key issue is that the victims of forced removals are far larger in number than often acknowledged in the policy debate, where the number of 3.5 million is frequently quoted from the *Surplus People's Project's* research conducted in the early 1980s. The numbers are far higher and are continually being augmented by, for example, retrenchment and eviction of farmworkers.
- 4 These village perspectives are developed in greater detail below.

- 5 Rahman (1986:1) makes some interesting observations about the populist thinking which informs such a technical approach with its emphasis on the often contradictory objectives of 'equity' and 'efficiency'.
- 6 These arguments are developed in a paper prepared for the World Bank and LAPC Conference held in Johannesburg. See B. Njobe 'Criteria for Participation in a South African Rural Restructuring programme', Land redistribution Options, October 1993.
- 7 The villages are: Manzini, Nsikazi district of Kangwane; Malekunu, Nsikazi district of Kangwane; Marite, Mapulaneng district of Lebowa; and Cork, Mhala district of Gazankulu.
- 8 The National Land Committee (NLC) co-ordinates the activities of a number of affiliated non-governmental service and developmental organisations working in rural areas across the country.

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